



Thoughts from Linda:

The Surprising Power of Not Knowing What to Do

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In the spirit of full disclosure, please note that Jay Cone and I are friends and colleagues, having worked together for 20+ years at Interaction Associates, a boutique consulting and training firm in Boston. He and his wife, Katherine, are friends of ours. We have watched their children grow up. He and his business partner, Lisa Weaver, are two of the finest people I know, and I greatly value their friendship. I am delighted that they have formed their firm, Unstuck Minds, bringing their many talents to the world by helping us all to be more creative and compassionate—and hopefully--unstuck.

I am thankful for Jay's editor, Alan Rinzler, who Jay has called "acerbic and principled" for his success in getting Jay to write *this* book, a book that has a big and bold mission and, as Jay says, "plays into a larger and more consequential arena." After reading the very moving *Preface* concerning George Floyd, I realize Jay met his "*up with this I will not put*" moment (the phrase my good friend Betty Williams often used to acknowledge our moments of transformation to action). He agreed with himself that he should shift in this moment, stepping from the balcony onto the dance floor himself, as he said, "taking his own medicine." We are all the better for that decision, for reading this book and knowing Jay, and benefitting from his wisdom and that degree in Philosophy, which you will learn more about in Chapter 7 entitled "My Useless Degree."

This book has a most noble purpose: to offer practices that help all of us adapt to the volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous world in which we live—in ways that allow us to meet the moment with compassion and creativity.

Yuval Noah Harari, in his previously reviewed book (on our bookshelf of 2020) *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, called for schools to teach the "4 Cs" of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. This book is both a compelling 'how-to'

guide based on compassion and a smart read that provides us with a set of frameworks to better unpack and understand our own barriers to getting “unstuck.” It then gives us a set of approaches to assist us in approaching the world in healthier and more creative ways.

The book is organized into three sections: *The Nature of our Inability to Deal with Chaos*, *The Beginners Mind*, and *the Four Disciplines for Navigating Chaos*. Jay uses personal stories and relevant examples throughout. I especially appreciate his treatment of implicit bias and the thorough exploration of both confirmation bias and bias for closure. His review of the Ladder of Inference is easy to comprehend, and the Inquiry Loop Model is an additive vehicle that boosts the power of the metaphor.

In Chapter 9, Question-ability, Jay re-frames the term itself, turning it on its head by using the two-word stems and coming up with a meaning of “the ability to question.” He follows this with a chapter entitled “The Downside of Expertise” and includes a rich section on what he labels “quicksand questions,” which are questions that are prompted by our scotoma, or blind spots, and by the very nature of the questions keep us stuck. He offers a terrific set of examples of quicksand questions, illustrating the power of reframing in order to expand our learning and make space for creativity to emerge.

The last chapter deals with solutions, and here he offers four disciplines:

1. Explore the Context
2. Analyze Structures
3. Empathize with Needs, and
4. Challenge Assumptions

In each discipline, he offers a variety of thought experiments and practical tips for addressing each topic. For example, in the discipline of Challenge Assumptions, one of the tips is to “Seek out a Reverse Mentor” which suggests the twist of matching senior leaders with people who are newer to the organization and can provide fresh eyes along with a generational (perhaps) perspective that is different.

Other tips in this discipline include the intriguing titles of: Check the Label, Listen for Worldviews, Mind the Measures, Reflect on Your Triggers, Start from Scratch, Learn about Your Implicit Associations, Check Your Sources, Externalize Your Thinking, and Listen as an Ally to an Adversary.

You will find numerous studies explained and referenced, and very current examples, even well into 2020. *The Surprising Power of NOT Knowing What to Do* is a timely and important book that offers optimism and powerful ways for us to shift our lives to ones that are more creative and compassionate.

Jay showed us the way just by writing this book. Thank you for your contribution to this field, Jay, and for this terrific book.